Disposing of Old Home Computers

Computers often hold personal, financial and other sensitive or confidential information. If you're getting rid of your old computer, there are things to do before you log off for the last time to protect your information and make sure your old hard drive doesn't become a 21st century treasure chest for identity thieves and information pirates.

Save Files: Before you get rid of your old computer save your important files on an external storage device such as: a USB drive; a CDRom; or an external hard drive. Another option is to transfer files directly to your new computer.

"Wipe" your hard drive clean: Remove sensitive data from your old computer with software designed to wipe computers. Simply deleting files does not remove them completely, neither does reformatting the drive, so someone else could access the information. Another option is to remove and physically destroy your old hard drive.

Wipe utility programs vary in their capabilities: some erase the entire disk, while others allow you to select files or folders to erase. They also vary in their effectiveness: programs that overwrite or wipe the hard drive many times are more effective than those that overwrite the drive only once.

Wipe utility software is available both online and in stores where computers are sold. A free product available is Darik's Boot and Nuke (DBAN) at http://www.dban.org/.

Disposal Options: Once you have a "clean" computer, here's how to dispose of it.

- **Recycle it.** Many computer manufacturers have programs to recycle computers and components. Check their websites or call their toll-free numbers for more information.

  The Metro Waste Authority's Regional Collection Center (RCC) in Bondurant, Iowa recycles electronic equipment. Call 515-967-5512 for more information.

- **Donate it**. Many organizations collect old computers and donate them to charities.

Source: OnGuard Online and the DAS-Information Security Office